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Coronet Hot Line Set Up For Tips

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PLANT CITY - Investigators formed a multiagency task force and set up a hot line Thursday to probe allegations that Coronet Industries workers were ordered to dump hazardous waste and deceive government inspectors.

Authorities said they hope residents will come forward with any information they have about the phosphate processor.

Members of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, U.S. attorney's office, and state and county environmental agencies met Thursday to discuss the case.

"We're all concerned about these serious allegations, and it's important to be on the same page," Hillsborough State Attorney Mark Ober said, adding that he expects the investigation to be lengthy. "It's a complicated matter, and it will take awhile to sort out the facts."

The 100-year-old plant is under orders from county and state regulators to clean up its air and water pollution. There are more than 130 violations that need to be corrected by 2005 to control air emissions. But an agreement with the county's Environmental Protection Commission caps the amount the company spends for repairs at \$50,000 per year. County officials are awaiting a schedule from Coronet, specifying dates when the repairs will be made.

A consent agreement with the Department of Environmental Protection is in the works. It addresses a 1999 hydrofluoric acid spill, a recent oil spill from leaky tanks and other contamination.

The Coronet plant also is part of a federally mandated public health assessment. Residents living northwest and east of the plant prompted health agencies to study the area to determine whether contaminants such as arsenic, lead, cadmium, chromium, fluoride and gross alpha radiation are affecting their health.

State health officials also are watching a nearby property where a developer proposes the city's largest development. The 1,300 acres of old mining land sits between the two neighborhoods and is home to two landfills, closed in the late 1960s. One of those landfills was permitted by the county and open for use by residents. The other was used for municipal waste, said Paul Shipfer, a manager in the EPC's waste division.

Another 138-acre landfill north of Sparkman Road and about a mile from Coronet was closed in 1989.

Two landfills appear to be on Coronet's property, Shipfer said. One was used for dumping oil, the other for industrial waste.



People who want to report information about pollution in the area are urged to call the hot line at (813) 274-6202.

Officials will conduct more tests on drinking water wells, and a public meeting will be at 7 p.m. Aug. 19 in Marshall Middle School for residents to discuss health concerns.

Reporter Deborah Alberto can be reached at (813) 754-3765.

This story can be found at: <http://tampatrib.com/FloridaMetro/MGAAXX1JJID.html>

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